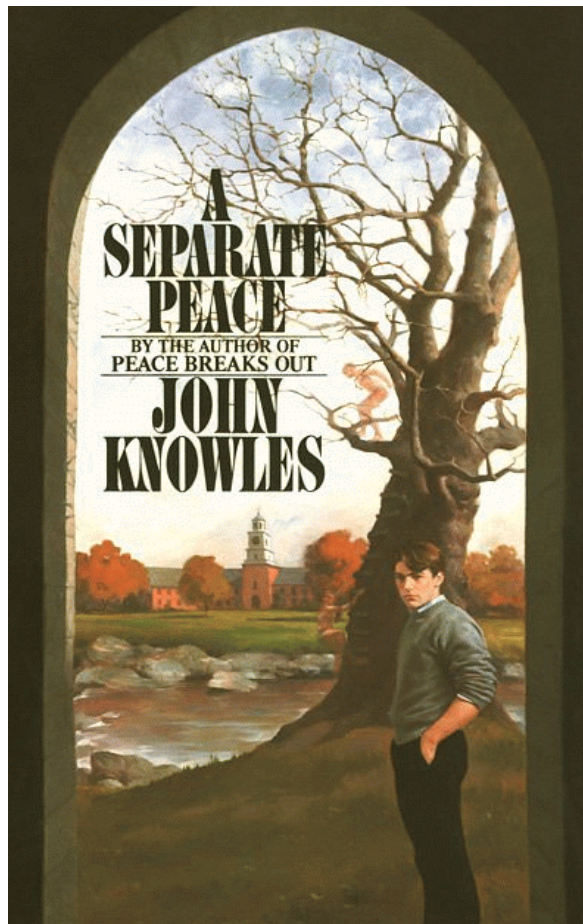


A Separate Peace

by **John Knowles**

New York, Bantam Books, August 1982



A Unit Resource Notebook

Miranda H. Lotz

For Brigham Young University
English 378 Dr. Sirpa Grierson

June 2003

Rationale

A Separate Peace by John Knowles offers students a plethora of learning opportunities within a single compact novel. Because of the time (1940's) and place (a private boys' high school) students will be able to easily compare and contrast the characters within the book to their own lives. Having this link to the book quickly gains student interest enhancing classroom atmosphere, discussion, and overall reader comprehension. Almost every student has admired another student's abilities or has been admired for his or her abilities. It is this relationship of admiration and envy that Knowles relies on to unfold the rivalry and animosity often overlooked in literature regarding high school.

The book primarily focuses on the relationship between Gene, a studious, quiet boy, and his best friend Phineas, a rowdy, daring, charismatic leader. *A Separate Peace* is narrated from Gene's point of view, and as such we receive a glorified view of Phineas and a critical self-view of Gene. These paradigms help the plot by showcasing the ambivalence that Gene feels toward his best friend and competitor.

Knowles artfully portrays the betrayal of Phineas by Gene through the use of foreshadowing and symbolism. The book has a foreboding tone from the opening rainy passage until the last few pages at the doctor's office. Throughout the novel, students will easily be able to feel the imminent tumbling avalanche of jealousy and guilt. Hints are given throughout the novel about the repercussions of Gene's actions. Moreover, the impending war serves as a perfect symbol of the strife between the two friends. World War II stole the lives of millions of people and likewise Gene's envy eventually steals the life of his friend. There are also smaller, easier to analyze symbols included in the book as well such as the tree, and the marble stairs.

A Separate Peace has been heralded as a work of art since its release. The adult motives, emotions, and consequences require a mature audience. While the novel is based on a tenth grade reading level the content is heavy enough and relevant enough that higher grades would benefit greatly from reading it.

Using this novel in the classroom allows students to explore their own choices by comparing them with the choices of the anti-hero Gene. It allows one of the most important discussions in the classroom to spring forth – the discussion on morality. Because of the relatively easy reading level attention may be placed upon the overarching themes of the novel. As a whole, *A Separate Peace* provides a forum in which a teacher may teach both literary and life lessons.

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